

# 2 programs take forms in stride

Since there's nothing glamorous about filling in forms, you can let your computer do most of the work. Two programs are available that let you fill in the data for forms on your computer and print them out on your printer. One of the programs even has extensive form design capabilities.

**Blankity Blank!** (Softstream Technologies Inc. 2740 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Fla. 33020, \$99.50) starts with the premise that you're already comfortable with your word processor and its mail-merge functions. It organizes and stores data input in the format of your word processor's mail-merge files. Through menus and on-screen prompts, the program ensures that every blank or "field" is filled in, and in the correct order. But it does not have any form design features. That task is left for your word processing program.

**FormWorx** (FormWorx Corp., Reservoir Place, 1601 Tra-



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pelo Road, Waltham, Mass. 02154, \$149), by contrast, is a full-blown forms design and data input program. Unlike **Blankity Blank!**, it doesn't work hand-in-hand with your existing word processing program. Instead, this stand-alone program gives you the resources for "drawing" all the lines and boxes of any form as well as offering validation and storage of the data generated by that form.

The simpler **Blankity Blank!** program treats every mail-merge document as a questionnaire. When you want to add data to your mail-merge file, it will prompt you, field by field, to "answer" the

appropriate question. This could be done either in real time, as in telephone surveys, or, if you already have data recorded elsewhere, in batches.

The more complicated **FormWorx** is actually two programs: **Draw & Edit** and **Fill & File**. The **Draw & Edit** part gives you a large dot-filled grid to "draw" on. With the aid of pull-down menus you can slap together lines and boxes, labels and headings. While the **FormWorx** manual — at a hefty 450 pages — seems depressingly big, the line drawing features are relatively easy to figure out from the on-screen menus.

On the downside, both programs have a very narrow audience. For simple forms, that are not used more than once or twice a day, it's far easier to continue to use a typewriter than to go through all of the trouble of setting up and using these programs. For more complicated forms, or forms that

are used more frequently, most businesses already use a database program to gather data. These programs only make sense if your situation falls in between.

■ **The Bottom Line.** If your company uses the same forms over and over, and you're tired of typing them, you may wish to consider some streamlining with **Blankity Blank!**, the easiest one of the two to use. It provides orderly mail-merge data files without too much effort. Because it works directly with your word processor and its mail-merge functions, it cuts down on the new commands you need to learn. But unless it will be used very often, I wouldn't bother.

*Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.*